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North Korea: Leadership, Foreign Policy, Military, Decision Making

S. J. Kim

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Korea Alliance
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Talking points for Princeton University conference.

I am not a featured speaker and thus no formal presentation is required. I will be a panelist to talk informally about North Korea's leadership, foreign policy, and the military, with a focus on how policy making may be formulated. I may or may not talk to every single one of these points. Most likely, I will skip through them.

@ Lead off with my preface to my talk about being exposed to North Korean affairs when I was 7 years old. There is a paucity of data and information, but we do know some things; there is some information. One just needs to know where to look. A vast majority of information is in Korean and is not in English.

Suh Dae-Sook's biography of Kim Il Sung (1988; reissued 1995) remains the sine qua non of NK leadership literature. Lee Chong Sik and Robert Scalapino's two volumes of Communism in Korea (1972) and Bruce Cumings' Origins of the Korean War are well known to everyone here.

Some books recently, inspired or provoked by the North Korean nuclear issue, have surfaced. Some good examples include – Victor Cha and David Kang's Nuclear North Korea (2003), Bradley Martin's Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader (2004), Adiran Buzo's The Guerilla Dynasty (1999).

But even Suh Dae-Sook's impressive collection of works - such as North Korea after Kim Il Sung / edited by Dae-Sook Suh, Chae-Jin Lee. Boulder ; London : Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998; Political leadership in Korea / edited by Dae-Sook Suh and Chae-Jin Lee. Seattle : University of Washington Press, c1976; Documents of Korean communism, 1918-1948. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1970; Korean communism, 1945-1980; Korean Communist movement, 1918-1948. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1967 – gives little guidance to how Kim Jong Il operates.

For that, we have to turn to recent Korean sources – in books and articles.

We have the book by former #2 man at NSC in the Blue House and now Minister of Unification, Lee Jong-Suk's Understanding North Korea. But just as Cumings relied heavily on mid- to low level North Korean Communist Party documents captured by UN forces in 1950-1951 (housed at the National Archives and which I have researched), Lee relied mostly on published issues of Rodong Sinmun. Cumings' "originality" lies mostly in his ability to read the language, and an intellectual framework housed in the revisionist school of American foreign policy. Lee's "originality" is also due to his resistance to the rigid anti-Communist orthodoxy of Korean politics and scholarship that had been in place until 1997.

I am not here to pick a fight with the revisionists (however misguided they may be) and I don't think Aaron asked me to be here to champion the post-revisionist arguments. But I

do suggest that scholars and observers and policy makers of North Korea cannot ignore the accounts of high level defectors and those who have spent time with Kim Jong Il.

Hwang Jang Yup's I have witnessed the truth of history
Lee Han Young's Royal family of Kim Jong Il
Lee Young Gook's I was Kim Jong Il's Bodyguard
Fujimoto Kenji's Kim Jong Il's Chef
Sohn Kwang Joo's Kim Jong Il Report
Ho Hae-Il's Magic Glass of North Korea

For accounts of brutality and violation of human rights, Lee Soon Ok's memoirs and Kang Chul Hwans' Aquariums of Pyongyang.

Most of these accounts are personality-driven but they are as good as it gets. Some sections of Hwang Jang Yup, Lee Young Gook, and Kenji have been translated but most of them miss the essential whole.

Unfortunate that most analysts and observers of Korean affairs cannot read Korean and thus miss out on a lot.

We have a plethora of articles, from actual interviews of former Unification Minister Chung Dong Young and Lim Dong Won's accounts of their face-to-face meetings with Kim Jong Il. We have the account of former President Kim Dae Jung and the heads of South Korean media companies who met with Kim. We have in addition accounts by defectors, high, middle, and low levels, which add more variety and color to an overall silhouette of Kim Jong Il and the leadership.

Chosun, Joongang, and Dong-A Ilbo tend to carry articles that are critical of NK whereas Hanhyoreh, Kyunghyang Shinmin, and Hankkok Ilbo tend to carry articles that are more sympathetic to NK.

We also have articles in internet newspapers such as Mirae News, OhMyNews, Dalian, Konas, Surprise, FreeNK, DailyNK.

Defector's testimony/accounts may be looked down upon, considered unreliable. If one had a wide range of access to information then yes, we should consider their accounts as one among many. However, in the case of NK, their accounts are as good as one gets.

Moreover, it would behoove those skeptics of NK defectors to be mindful of history.

Jay Nordlinger said it best:

Stories of the Holocaust that made its way to Western Europe and the US were belittled as Jewish whining.

Accounts of the Soviet Union were dismissed as rumors in Riga.

Accounts of defectors from Mao's Cultural Revolution who made it to Hong Kong were labeled as 'warlordism.'

Those who escaped from Castro and told their story were called Batista's stooges.

Chun Kiwon (Oscar Schindler of NK) and Kim Sungmin (former lieutenant in KPA and now President of Radio Free North Korea; met President Bush) have an excellent knowledge of NK.

All these words were wasted to prepare you for the paucity of information we have about the leadership and how policy is made.

From the CIA website, we have this:

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/chiefs/chiefs94.html>

Chiefs of State and Cabinet Members of Foreign Governments

Last Updated: 6/28/2006

Korea, North--NDE

General Secretary, Korean Workers' Party (KWP)	KIM Jong Il
Supreme Cdr. of Korean People's Army (KPA)	KIM Jong Il, <i>Mar.</i>
Chmn., National Defense Commission (NDC)	KIM Jong Il, <i>Mar.</i>
First Vice Chmn., NDC	JO Myong Rok, <i>VMar.</i>
Vice Chmn., NDC	
Vice Chmn., NDC	RI Yong Mu, <i>VMar.</i>
Member, NDC	KIM Yong Chun, <i>VMar.</i>
Member, NDC	KIM Il Chol, <i>VMar.</i>
Member, NDC	JON Pyong Ho
Member, NDC	
Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) Presidium	
Pres., SPA Presidium	KIM Yong Nam
Vice Pres., SPA Presidium	YANG Hyong Sop
Vice Pres., SPA Presidium	KIM Yong Dae
Honorary Vice Pres., SPA Presidium	PAK Song Chol
Honorary Vice Pres., SPA Presidium	KIM Yong Ju
Sec. Gen., SPA Presidium	CH'OE Yong Rim
Member, SPA	RYU Mi Yong
Member, SPA	KANG Yong Sop
Member, SPA	PAK Thae Hwa
Member, SPA	HONG Sok Hyong
Member, SPA	RI Kwang Ho

Member, SPA	KIM Kyong Ho
Member, SPA	RYOM Sun Gil
Member, SPA	SUNG Sang Sop
Member, SPA	PAK Sun Hui
Member, SPA	PYON Yong Rip
Member, SPA	THAE Hyong Chol
Member, SPA	KANG Chang Uk
Cabinet	
Premier	PAK Pong Ju
Vice Premier	KWAK Pom Gi
Vice Premier	RO Tu Chol
Vice Premier	JON Sung Hun
Min. of Agriculture	RI Kyong Sik
Min. of Chemical Industry	RI Mu Yong
Min. of City Management	CHOE Jong Gon
Min. of Commerce	RI Yong Son
Min. of Construction & Building-Materials Industries	TONG Jong Ho
Min. of Crude Oil Industry	KO Jong Sik
Min. of Culture	KANG Nung Su
Min. of Education	KIM Yong Jin
Min. of Electronic Industry	O Su Yong
Min. of Extractive Industries	KANG Min Chol
Min. of Finance	MUN Il Bong
Min. of Fisheries	RI Song Ung
Min. of Foreign Affairs	PAEK Nam Sun
Min. of Foreign Trade	RIM Kyong Man
Min. of Forestry	SOK Kun Su
Min. of Labor	JONG Yong Su
Min. of Land & Environment Preservation	PAK Song Nam
Min. of Land & Marine Transport	KIM Yong Il
Min. of Light Industry	RI Ju O
Min. of Machine-Building Industry	JO Pyong Ju
Min. of Metal Industry	KIM Sung Hyon
Min. of People's Security	JU Sang Song

Min. of Post & Telecommunications	RYU Yong Sop
Min. of Power & Coal Industries	JU Tong Il
Min. of Procurement & Food Administration	CHOE Nam Gyun
Min. of Public Health	KIM Su Hak
Min. of Railways	KIM Yong Sam
Min. of State Construction Control	PAE Tal Jun
Min. of State Inspection	KIM Ui Sun
Chmn., State Planning Commission	KIM Kwang Rin
Chmn., Physical Culture & Sports Guidance Commission	MUN Jae Dok
Pres., National Academy of Sciences	PYON Yong Rip
Pres., Central Bank	KIM Wan Su
Dir., Central Statistics Bureau	KIM Chang Su
Chief Sec.	KIM Yong Ho
Min. of People's Armed Forces (is not subordinate to the Cabinet)	KIM Il Chol, <i>VMar.</i>
Permanent Representative to the UN, New York	PAK Kil Yon

[Chiefs of State Home](#)

We compared and conflated the differing and contradictory accounts of who is truly important and which groups they might have been in, in order to ascertain if we can gain a glimpse into how policy was made. Individuals and names are important. Source: Hwang Jang Yup, Sohn Kwang-Joo, Lee Han Il, ROK Unification Ministry Who's Who in NK (Dong-A Ilbo); NKnet.org's 2004 profile of 34 elite.

Some theories:

In war or crisis, strategic, operational, and tactical architecture of formal diagrams and models collapses. The fog of war means fluidity of information (lack of real time information) = cloud of uncertainty. This is exacerbated in a single point regime like KJI's.

In NK, fear of doing wrong (and be punished by KJI) may outweigh formal training.

Do not assume rationality, order, and shared situational awareness in NK.

Normal decision making may not exist: who and which organization?

- Command by direction (vertical and horizontal chain of command)
- Command by function (KPW or KPA or SSD; villas; UGF)
- Command by plan (organizational setup and rules)
- Command by influence: proximity to KJI may be the key; military ties are important)

Key Players in North Korea

Kim Jong Il

- Dear Leader; Marshal
- 61 years old; 158 cm; 80 kg
- General Secretary of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP)
- Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army (KPA)
- Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC)

Kim Kyung-Hee

- Younger sister
- Highly trusted; extremely influential
- 57 years old
- Head of light industry division of KWP's Economic Policy Audit Department
- May be more cruel than her brother

Chang Seung-Taek

- Married to Kim Kyung-Hee; brother-in-law
- 57 years old; very influential
- First Vice Department Director of KWP Central Committee
- Heads important economic delegations to Seoul
- Demoted but now making a comeback

Members of the National Defense Commission (NDC)

Cho Myong-Rok

- Vice Marshal and First Vice Chairman of the NDC
- Director of the KPA General Political Department
- 75 years old; very loyal to Kim Jong Il

Kim Il-Chol

- Vice Marshal and Vice Chairman of the NDC
- 70 years old

Yi Yong-Mu

- Vice Marshal and Vice Chairman of the NDC
- 80 years old

Kim Young-Choon

- Vice Marshal and member of the NDC
- Chief of KPA General Staff
- 67 years old

Paek Hak-Lim

- Vice Marshal and member of the NDC
- 85 years old

Yi Ul-Sol

- Vice Marshal and member of the NDC
- 82 years old

Chon Byong-Ho

- Member of the NDC
- 77 years old

Kim Chol-Man

- Member of the NDC
- 85 years old

Yeon Hyong-Muk

- KPA Secretary in charge of the Second Economy (weapons and combat materiel for the KPA and Kim Jong Il's bodyguards)
- Previously Prime Minister
- 69 years old

Kim Yong-Sun

- Head of Asia Pacific Peace Committee in charge of economic negotiations with South Korea
- One of 3 secretaries of KWP Central Committee (Kim Kuk-Thae, Kim Ki-Nam are the others)
- 69 years old; fiercely loyal to Kim Jong Il

Kang Sok-Ju

- First Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs
- Confidant of Kim Jong Il on foreign policy decision-making
- 64 years old
- Announced North Korea's uranium enrichment program
- Led 1994 Agreed Framework negotiations

•North Korean team

- Average age: 73-74
- Veterans of Korean War
- Experienced in foreign policy negotiations; brinksmanship
- Largely unchanged since 1998

Sohn Kwang-Joo has a more detailed breakdown. To Sohn, there are two groups/factions surrounding Kim Jong Il (or those that KJI surrounds himself with) – those who are akin to a Kitchen Cabinet, and those are trusted to carry out KJI's orders.

The trusted Kitchen cabinet members: Chang Seung Taek, Kim Yong Soon (charge of South Korean affairs – dead), Kim Myung Gook (KPA Director of Operations; KWP Central Committee), Moon Seung Sool (First Vice Director of Organization and Guidance Department), KWP Central Committee, Oh Gheuk Ryeul (Vice Director, Operations Department, KWP), Won Oeung-Hee (State Security Department director, KWP Central Committee), Kang Suk Ju (First Vice Director of Foreign Affairs, KWP Central Committee)

Those trusted to carry out orders: Kye Oeung Tae (Secretary to KWP Central Committee, KWP Political Committee), Kim Young Nam (President, Supreme People's Assembly, KWP Central Committee), Hong Sung Nam *KWP Central Committee), Kim Ki Nam (KWP Central Committee, Director of Propaganda), Kim Dahl-Hyun (KWP Central Committee)

Sohn Kwang-Joo: KWP-KPA relationship

The party controls the military personnel.

Party Secretariat Office (5 people) – Commander of KPA, Commander of General Staff, Chief of Political Department Chief of Operations Department, and KWP executive. Sometimes, a 6th person – head of State Security.

A key organization here is the Organization and Guidance Department (also UPKOREA.net journalist's article), esp. the 13th Bureau that gives direction to and controls the KPA. Currently, Lee Yong Chul, another First Vice Director of the OGD, heads this up.

A military coup is almost impossible unless the KWP official is in bed with possible pretenders. Chun Kiwon says, “younger officers or party officials cannot think of organizing or trying to modernize.”

UPKOREA.net account: Kim Hyung Soo

Kim Jong Il controls the military and party (and decision making through 5 key people):

Hwang Byung Suh (KWP OGD Vice Director), Lee Myung Soo (KPA Chief of General Staff, Director of Operations), Hyun Chul Hae (KPA Director of Organization of Political Department, Director of Organization); Park Jae Kyung (KPA Director of Propaganda of Political Department), Lee Yong Chul (KWP OGD First Vice Director)

Hwang controls all KPA personnel decisions.

In effect, they are KWP political directors controlling the KPA. KPA cannot have any independence.

Kim Il Sung's C2 in times of war: Kim → KPA Chief → Chief of Political Department → Chief of General Staff

Kim Jong Il's wartime C2: Kim gets rid of middle men. Kim (Supreme Commander) → Director of Operations Department of General Staff (Lee Myung Soo).

Directly. No military involvement of KPA chief or KPA Chief of Political Department.

Ho Hae-Il's The Magic Glass of North Korea

Some say, as long as 350,000 elite are taken care of, things will be okay.

Chun Kiwon says Pyongyang, 2 million

700,000 (KWP, KPA, SSD) – all share same fate; if KJI can satisfy them, he can last. All of China and SK aid goes to them

2 million Pyongyang elite, 5 million on the suburbs/surrounding areas of Pyongyang, the rest are sub-human, not even humans. Many of those who defect are those without formal education. Those who defect are mostly low class, trash, non-elites, non-educated

Ho Hae-Il breaks down the composition of the NK elite.

40% - there are two factions within this 40% elite

- 1) from right and good background, with some skills (party, law, security)
- 2) background not so good but have solid useful industrial skills (above and economy, administration)

First group have seen the fall of SU and Eastern Europe, and realize they are gone if NK falls. Their fear having to face up to possible truth commissions after collapse and so they are of the mind – will go to the end with KJI. They know they have lived off their parent's and family's good name, getting special treatment, and they fear they have no skills or skill-sets that can be used in a capitalistic society.

The second group consists of smart, opportunistic people. They know “this is not the right way” but they cannot let go of the privileges they receive for being loyal to the regime. They have to be this way for self-survival.

35% - middle class (scientists, skilled workers, writers, artists, intellectuals, doctors, students); their anti-state feelings are low

25% - hostile group. From “bad” background and so receive no privileges. Their frame of mind is – “Hope there is a war so that everything will be destroyed and we can start anew.” The regime has a list of those to execute from this group.

But the regime fears the middle-class group the most. They feel that these people possess the skills that would allow them to eat and live in a capitalistic society, and they are susceptible to capitalist influences.

The KPA is very corrupt. Yes, the KPA is weakening overall but there are about 120-130,000 guerillas (he is referring to Special Forces) who may fight to the end.

Some basic military data: Chosun Weekly (February 5, 2006)

1 million Army
60,000 Navy
110,000 Air Force

Total: about 1,170,000

770,000 reserves

About 100,000 Special Forces Masashi Fujimoto's Capability Analysis of North Korean Special Forces" in www.drc-jpn.org)

70% deployed in the Pyongyang-Wonsan line

About \$5 billion in military spending (CIA)

North Korea has engaged in terrorist acts –

1968 commando raid on Seoul's Blue House
1974 assassination attempt on Park Chung Hee
1983 assassination attempt on Chun Doo Whan in Burma (17 Cabinet members died)
1987 bombing of Korean Air Line from Baghdad (NK agent captured)
1996 submarine incursion into Kangnung, SK
1999 June 15 incursion into SK maritime territory – Sin Dong-A (July 1, 2006)
2002 June 29 attack on SK naval vessels in West Sea

Hwang Jang Yup and Lee Han Young say that KJI responsible for all, esp. 1983 and 1987 incidents.

Sin Dong-A (July 2006) – KJI personally ordered and managed the June 15, 1999 and June 29, 2002 naval clashes with South Korea. Contrary to Leftist scholars like Kang Jung Koo who claimed that these incidents were carried out by rogue KPA elements, this account demonstrates that KJI was not only fully in control but that he bypassed his military chiefs and reached down to the operators and guided them. These two incidents underscore the lack of formal structure in NK's decision making. It's at the whim of one man. Sig Harrison claimed that there were doves and hawks, and that our policy somehow made the hawks constrain KJI and the MFA who want to negotiate with us. I see absolutely no evidence for this assertion, and my personal view is that Mr. Harrison either has access to information we are not privy to or he is disastrously misguided. I believe he is of the type who also made similar claims that Rafsanjani was a moderate we

can deal with. To be sure, there may be varied interests and groups under Kim Jong Il, but I hope I have shown that there really is in essence a faction of one.

As unique as NK may be, it is a totalitarian state. My point above is related to this one. Which is that to better understand Nk's leadership, foreign policy and decision making, one can resort to the literature on the nature of totalitarianism in addition to the Korean sources cited above. The absolute fear that permeates a totalitarian state and society is something, I think, we who have been ensconced in liberal, free societies find hard to fathom. One story. A close aide to KJI who had served him since childhood had access to a private elevator that KJI uses in his office. This man put out his cigarette in the elevator's ashtray and when KJI found out, he had him and the entire family sent to a concentration camp. A society that prohibits freedom of movement, a state that keeps tight surveillance over its people, even trusted ones, a regime that excuses no mistakes or frivolity will be alien to those who enjoy the federal highway system, the 2nd Amendment, and due process. As Jeanne Kirkpatrick suggested, the distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism is distinct and at times wide. Vladimir Bokovsky's memoirs and Robert Cnquest's history books, and Leszek Kolakowski's philosophical treatises have been invaluable to me as I try to make some sense of NK.

Many have argued that we should not confront KJI because he will lash out. I understand the theory but I see no evidence to support that thesis. Advocates of this view cite psychological profiles of a demented Kim, a rat cornered, to make the case that dialogue is the answer since he may resort to violent measures. I beg to differ. On the contrary, I must ask, when did Kim or NK engage in violent acts? Were they in response to our hard line policies or actions, or did they occur when things were relatively quiet?

1968 commando raid on Seoul's Blue House
1974 assassination attempt on Park Chung Hee
1983 assassination attempt on Chun Doo Whan in Burma (17 Cabinet members died)
1987 bombing of Korean Air Line from Baghdad (NK agent captured)
1996 submarine incursion into Kangnung, SK
1999 June 15 incursion into SK maritime territory – Sing Dong-A (July 1, 2006)
2002 June 29 attack on SK naval vessels in West Sea

What hard line policies or measures were undertaken by the US or ROK before these events? None. Actually, there were lulls, of relative tranquility and nonaction.

Two examples of demonstrated NK behavior to our "hard line" stance:

1953 Korean War armistice: North Korea signed agreement only after President Eisenhower hinted that the U.S. would consider the use of all weapons in its arsenal

1994 Agreed Framework: North Korea concluded negotiations only after President Clinton deployed Patriot missiles to South Korea, made plans to resume joint war exercises, and reinforced U.S. troops in South Korea

Miscellaneous (possible use)

Germany-Korea unification differences

- 1) Hu Jintao-Kim Jong Il closer than Gorbachev-Eric Honnecker. Gorby abandons Honnecker and allows Warsaw Pact to dissolve
- 2) Germany peace treaty (1961)-Korean Armistice Agreement (1953)
- 3) Chancellor Kohl is pro-Western, pro-US. Roh is less so, more nationalistic
- 4) West Germany wanted unification, precedent of Willie Brandt's Ostpolitik and Helsinki Accords. South Korea does not want NK collapse and unification. KDJ' Sunshine is not same as Ostpolitik
- 5) Economy – East Germany best run economy in the Warsaw Pact. 6:1 discrepancy. In Korea's case, 30:1 disparity
- 6) Berlin at heart of East Germany (4 Allied powers – US, SU, GB, France – share control of city). No such Berlin in North Korea.

Miscellaneous (possible use)

Hwang Jang Yup - Daily NK August 29, 2006 – “the testing needed to complete nuclear weapons completed by 1994” - his own words.

Dong-A Ilbo: Hwang Jang Yup’s (personal tutor to Kim Jong Il; father of the *juche* doctrine; high level member of the Korean Worker’s Party; defected in 1997) relays his conversation with Jeon Byong-Ho (current National Defense Commission member and the-then KWP’s Munition/Military Industry Secretary): “Upon returning from a month long visit to Pakistan (in 1996), Jeon said to me: ‘Now, we don’t need plutonium. We can now make nuclear weapons with Uranium-235.’”

Testimony from defector Kang Song-San (July 1994)”

“I have heard that North Korea ... already possesses five nuclear bombs. I heard in October 1993, from a responsible official of the State Security Department, who is in charge of security of the nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, that ‘What matters is not whether to possess nuclear bombs but how many.... If we are successful by 1994, we will be able to have up to ten.... If we are capable of possessing about ten, we will be able to make it known to the international community and to hold the North-U.S. talks or the South-North summit talks from a position of advantage.’ Therefore, I think that until at least ten nuclear warheads are produced, Kim Jong Il will continue to adopt delaying tactics.”

Defector Kim Dae-Ho:

“There is a scene that makes me shudder when I recall it. That is the picture of workers who jumped into the uranium solution wearing only underpants, in order to remove a piece of cloth that plugged the valve inside the uranium tank... They were passed off as our model, that is as ‘paragons’ who sacrificed their own bodies without hesitation, all for nuclear development.”

Procurement – April 28, 2003 – Ville de Virgo ship stopped in Suez Canal with 6061-T6 aluminum tubes destined for Shenyang Aircraft Corporation, likely for NK.

How many bombs? This depends on how much plutonium or uranium or a mixture NK uses per bomb – which depends both on the technology NK has, and the yield and accuracy required for the chosen target set – which depends ultimately on what they intended to sue it for (terror weapon/city buster or military targets)

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